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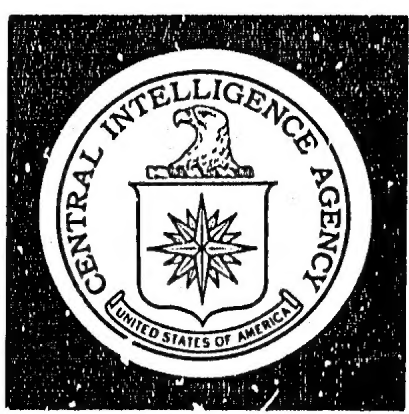
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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

EAST PAKISTAN: AN INDEPENDENT NATION?

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1 March 1971
No. 1270/71

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
1 March 1971

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

East Pakistan: An Independent Nation?

Introduction

Chances of a separation between East Pakistan and West Pakistan have increased sharply since the beginning of 1971. East Pakistanis, who for years have complained of alleged West Pakistani exploitation and dominance of the nation's political and economic life, gave overwhelming electoral support last December to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Awami League (AL). The AL will hold an absolute majority in the national constituent assembly originally scheduled for 3 March. On 1 March, however, President Yahya Khan announced the indefinite postponement of the assembly's opening. Mujib, who since 1966 has campaigned for extensive provincial autonomy, has called for a constitution based on a six-point program that would leave the central government with responsibility only for defense and foreign affairs. The AL, however, has no elected representatives from the West wing, and Z. A. Bhutto, head of the major political party there, has declared that his party will boycott the constituent assembly sessions because, he claims, the AL is unwilling to compromise and has put West Pakistan in a "take-it-or-leave-it" position. Several other West Pakistani delegates have fallen in behind Bhutto's position, and it is doubtful that either the West Pakistani-dominated establishment or the military would allow a document based on the AL platform to be promulgated in the absence of concurrence from Bhutto's

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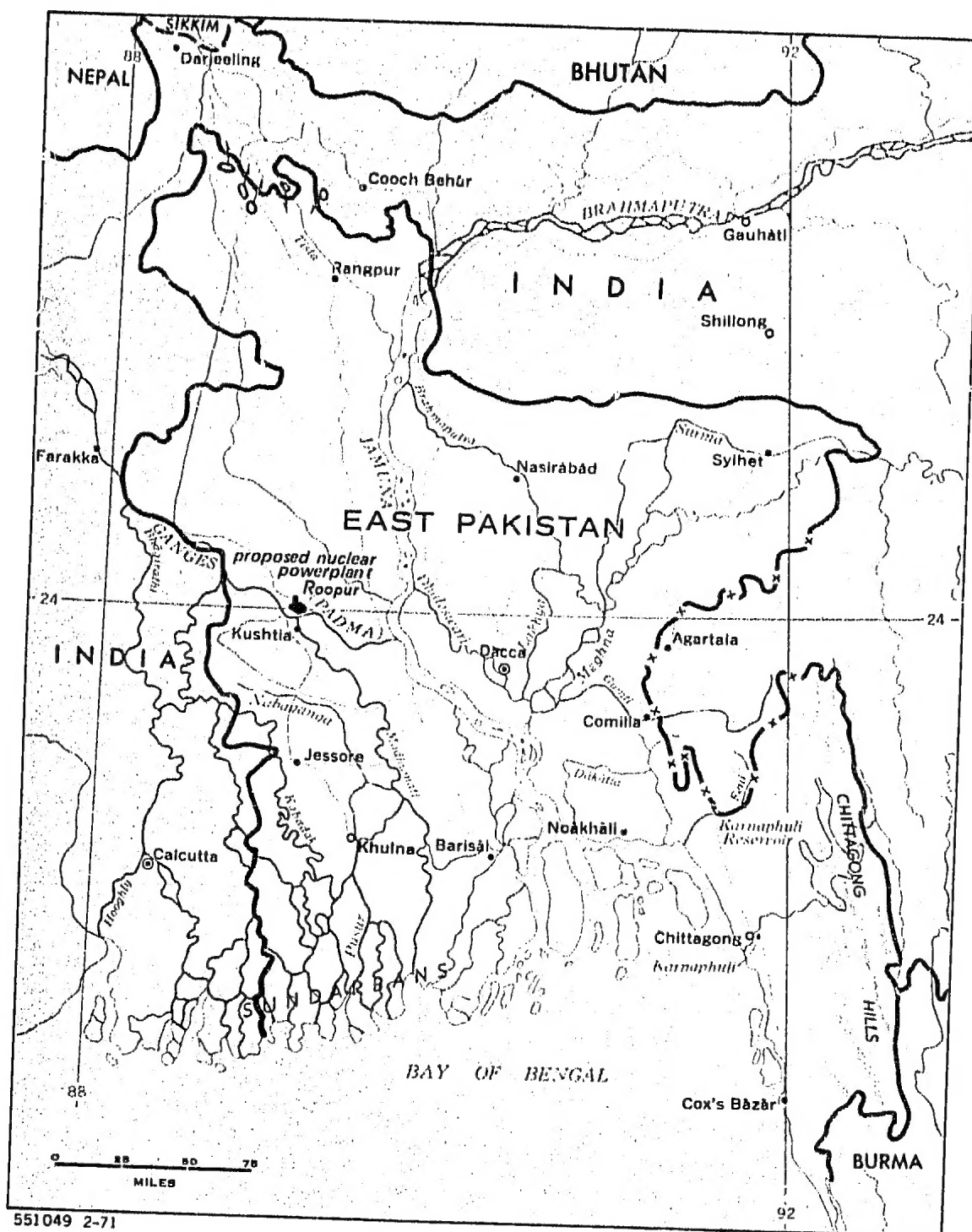
party. In recent weeks, AL spokesmen have sounded out possible foreign support for an independent East Pakistan, stating that a unilateral declaration of independence would be the result if the AL's goal of provincial autonomy were thwarted.

This memorandum examines some of the more important assets and liabilities that an independent East Pakistan would possess, but offers no judgments on the chances for separation or on the viability of an independent East Pakistan. Emphasis is given to political and social aspects.*

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Economic Factors

1. An estimated 73-75 million East Pakistanis are jammed into a major portion of the subtropical Bengal Plain, a land area about the size of Florida. The average population density is about 1,300 persons per square mile. Based on a conservative growth rate, the population could reach 115 million by 1985 and 180 million by the year 2000, a figure that would entail the staggering average population density of 3,275 persons per square mile.

2. Other factors contribute toward making East Pakistan, whether independent or not, one of the world's greatest potential nightmares. In recent years East Pakistan has not been agriculturally self-supporting, and its estimated future population will further diminish the land's capacity to sustain. Jute has been the major cash crop, and the manufacture of jute products is the main industry in East Pakistan, employing about 45 percent of the industrial work force. Recently, however, jute products have encountered increasing competition in world markets from synthetics, making the future of this important source of foreign exchange somewhat uncertain.

3. Agriculture--and therefore the province's economy--is geared to an annual cycle of flooding by the region's many rivers, especially the Brahmaputra and the Ganges. Flooding that occurs too early or too late, however, can wreak disaster. Occasional simultaneous peak flood periods have had catastrophic results, dramatizing the need for massive and expensive flood-control projects. On the other hand, reduced flows during the year-end dry season in the southwestern portion of the province necessitate extensive irrigation projects. Furthermore, East Pakistan is subject to salinization of its seaward edge and to devastating cyclones, originating in the Bay of Bengal, that frequently cause extensive property damage and loss of life. Rarely, however, are such storms as disastrous as the one in November 1970, in which as many as 500,000 people may have been killed.

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4. East Pakistan lacks mineral resources and power for the development of a modern technology. A natural gas field near Sylhet in the northeast is the only available major resource for the production of thermal power and for the manufacture of chemical fertilizers. There are no easily exploitable coal fields in East Pakistan, although coal is abundant within a few hundred miles to the west in neighboring India. An independent East Pakistan might have better trade relations with India and therefore better access to its coal; at present, politics dictate that East Pakistan import coal from Communist China at a price approximately three times what it would cost from India. Hydroelectric power possibilities in East Pakistan are limited. A nuclear power plant scheduled to be constructed with Belgian aid at Roopur near Khustia should help to expand the power supply, but it will take five years to complete the plant once construction has begun. At present, power shortages and frequent outages impose a major restraint on economic growth.

5. Lack of an adequate transport system also inhibits economic growth. Waterways provide the primary mode of transportation, but movement along the delta rivers is hampered by seasonally inadequate depths, meandering courses, and shifting channels. The riverine nature of the land and the annual flooding make the construction of roads and railroads very expensive, and the supply of construction materials is inadequate. The use of three track gauges for the railroad system adds to the transportation problem. A system of STOL aircraft transport is presently in its infancy in East Pakistan.

6. The annual per capita income of East Pakistan is about US\$60, in real terms not much higher than the level in 1948, and far below that in West Pakistan. The population is 90 percent rural and only about 20 percent literate. According to the 1961 census, only 4.3 percent of the East Pakistani labor force was engaged in manufacturing, and this almost entirely in small-scale industry. Private

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enterprise is generally very inefficient in East Pakistan, where numerous small, uneconomic shops produce similar products, using outdated methods and without sufficient capital for expansion.

7. In comparison with the West wing, there has been little private investment in East Pakistan. In recent years, despite government incentives, private investment in the East has averaged only about 25 percent of the nation's total. Capital is largely in the hands of a few wealthy families who migrated from India and Burma after partition of the subcontinent in 1947 or who have moved over from West Pakistan in subsequent years. Much of the managerial class resident in East Pakistan is composed of Urdu-speaking Muslim refugees from India, who have never been accepted by the Bengalis and who would probably move to West Pakistan if the East wing became independent. There is, furthermore, a shortage of workers with technical skills. To promote the development of an independent East Pakistan, many of those who are now trained would have to spend considerable time in teaching others, at the cost of efficiency and productivity at least in the short run.

Social Factors

8. An independent East Pakistan, which would probably be called Bangla Desh ("Bengal Nation"), would be largely a homogeneous ethnic entity, composed overwhelmingly of Bengalis. The 1961 census indicated that only 0.66 percent of those resident in East Pakistan claimed a language other than Bengali or some insignificant local languages as their mother tongues. Presumably most of the West Pakistanis now resident in East Pakistan would return to the West wing should East Pakistan become independent. There are also about 500,000 members of various tribes in East Pakistan, living relatively peacefully in rather primitive conditions, mostly in the Chittagong hill tracts along the Burmese border.

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9. Among the native Bengalis of East Pakistan, however, is a sizable Hindu minority, about one-sixth of the province's total population. Traditionally these Hindus have had no significant voice in the government, have not been able to compete on equal terms for jobs, and have often been subject to reprisals for anti-Muslim incidents in India.

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13. East Pakistan lacks a strong indigenous middle class. The pre-partition middle class, which provided East Bengal's artisans, entrepreneurs, and professionals, was primarily Hindu. Most of this group has since migrated from East Pakistan. The vacuum has been only partially filled by about one million Biharis, Urdu-speaking Muslim refugees from India. (In East Pakistan the term "Bihari," which indicates an origin in the Indian state of Bihar, has become confused with the Urdu word "Bahri," meaning "outsider," and is applied to these Urdu-speaking refugees.) The Bengali-speaking majority views the Biharis as a foreign element and discriminates against them, perhaps partly because the Bengalis resent the fact that these non-Bengali Muslims have succeeded in dominating such a large portion of the business community.

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14. The Biharis in turn have identified with the West Pakistani - dominated central government rather than with Bengali political and economic interests. As a result, in the event of East Pakistan's independence those Biharis who could afford it would probably join West Pakistani businessmen who reside in East Pakistan in leaving of their own accord. They might even be expelled from the country. In either event, they would take with them much of the technical, administrative, and commercial know-how presently in East Pakistan as well as their own liquid assets.

Political Factors

15. When India and Pakistan were partitioned in 1947, many factors pointed to a major political role for East Pakistan in the new nation. The East had (and still has) a larger population than West Pakistan, and the Bengali traditionally have produced some of South Asia's literary and intellectual leaders. Its jute crop accounted for the largest portion of Pakistan's foreign exchange earnings. The Bengal region of pre-partition India had a long history of political organization and agitation, in sharp contrast to West Pakistan, where petty personal feuding and rivalries among different linguistic and tribal groups blurred political life.

16. East Pakistani politicians, however, gave way to West Pakistanis and the refugees from India. Even when Bengalis such as Kwaja Nazimuddin and H. S. Suhrawardy, who served as prime ministers of Pakistan in the early 1950s, headed the government, they tended to concentrate on mending and defending their political fences with West Pakistani leaders and on building West Pakistani - oriented political machines. Gradually East Pakistan slipped into a virtual semicolonial political status.

17. [REDACTED]
the Bengalis never gained a foothold in the armed

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forces of undivided India or of independent Pakistan. Thus, they were deprived not only of the ability to apply military pressure against the West wing but also of any voice at all when the military intervened to take over power in the central government. Furthermore, the central government was largely successful in its efforts to prevent the Bengalis from forming major, distinguishable political parties. With a few exceptions, for almost two decades East Pakistani politicians were relegated to minor and largely ineffectual roles in national politics.

18. This situation began to change in 1966, however, after Sheikh Mujibur Rahman developed his six-point program for provincial autonomy. Mujib called for a federal, parliamentary government, with the national administration responsible only for defense and external affairs. The federating states would be in charge of their own fiscal policies, maintain their own foreign trade accounts, and raise and control their own militia or paramilitary forces. Finally, there would be two separate currencies mutually or freely convertible in each wing. Although the campaign launched by his Awami League (AL) was halted from mid-1966 to early 1969, while Mujib was in prison, Bengali resentment of the central government was rekindled in 1968 by a badly organized "show trial" of a number of Bengalis accused of plotting East Pakistan's secession. This resentment became intertwined with the anti-Ayub movement, which had erupted in both wings of Pakistan in 1968, and the imposition of martial law in March 1969 merely slowed the mounting drive among East Pakistanis for provincial autonomy. As the leading champion of autonomy, Mujib's AL steadily gained popular support, culminating in its sweep of elections in East Pakistan in December 1970.

19. Today, an independent East Pakistan would begin its existence as essentially a one-party state, that of the AL and Mujibur Rahman.

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[redacted] Mujib appears for now to be the undisputed leader of East Pakistan. He is probably the most effective Bengali leader at playing on the one theme uniting the masses of East Pakistan--Bengali nationalism.

20. Mujib, a man of action, appears to rely more on his own instincts than on advice from others. He has numerous advisers and listens to them, but feels no compulsion to act counter to his own inclinations. Below Mujib is an upper echelon of AL leaders, most of whom are lawyers by training. Generally they have been "seasoned" by years in jail under previous regimes and have emerged as hard-bitten, professional politicians. Their average age is about 50. Mujib also has a coterie of "experts" who are called upon to give advice in areas of their professional competence. At present no one has been identified from within the leadership of the AL who could easily succeed Mujib.

21. The AL is a well organized party that incorporates many disparate groups--ranging from poor peasants to wealthy businessmen and industrialists. Although linked primarily by intense anti - West Pakistani feelings, the AL would probably manage to maintain its basic unity in the early years of East Pakistani independence. It is not certain, however, that this unity could long endure should the AL fail to solve rapidly East Pakistan's considerable economic problems. Furthermore, the AL has had no experience in recent years in governing.

22. Current alternatives to the AL in East Pakistan are dismal. The conservative religious parties, dedicated to a strict Muslim ideology, would be totally incapable of guiding East Pakistan through the maze of problems it would face. Other conservative and moderate political parties have failed in the past and offer little to East Pakistanis. On the left is a jumble of disunited Communist and other radical groups, split among themselves by their leaders' personal differences and by different views on the timetable for violent revolution in East Pakistan. Nevertheless, it

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could be to one of these groups that many Bengalis might turn in the event of dissatisfaction with the AL.

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23. Although East Pakistan would begin its independent existence with almost exclusive political reliance upon the AL, it would not be totally without the basis for some governmental infrastructure. Recent statistics on Pakistan's civil service--the elite group of careerists who man the top governmental posts--are not available, but the trend since 1962 has been for a greater role for Bengalis in this still predominantly West Pakistani body. In 1965 there were 151 Bengalis in the civil service out of a nationwide total of 461, and after 1966 more were presumably added. Although the proportion of Bengalis has apparently increased, most of the top posts are still held by West Pakistanis, and the over-all quality of the Bengali civil servants is unknown. Under Mujibur Rahman, however, a civil service might not have as great a role to play. In a united Pakistan, the AL called for a restructuring of the civil service apparatus and its replacement by a smaller, less powerful organization. Presumably such plans might also apply to an independent East Pakistan.

24. Below the elite civil service level, many Bengalis have held lesser positions in the governmental bureaucracy. As of late 1970, however, only a few government agencies drew as many as half their employees from East Pakistan.

25. Some Bengalis have also held top political jobs in previous regimes--including five members of the nine-man martial law cabinet recently dissolved by President Yahya Khan. Bengalis with cabinet experience, however, might be judged as "tainted" by their collaboration with the West Pakistani establishment.

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Foreign Relations and Security

26. Complete statistics on the total number of Bengalis in the Pakistani foreign service are not available, but a year ago out of a total of 53 Pakistani heads of mission, 11 were Bengalis. Bengali assets for the conduct of an independent foreign policy cannot be assessed realistically. Mujib is relatively well traveled and has expressed himself on certain foreign policy aspects. He favors the restoration of trade relations with India and the peaceful settlement of outstanding disputes. Although independence for East Pakistan might generate among some Bengalis on both sides of the Indo-Pak border dreams of--and in New Delhi concern over--a "Greater Bengal," the long-seated Muslim-Hindu rivalry extends to Bengalis and would be a strong obstacle to the realization of such a concept.

27. The AL does not appear to be particularly sympathetic to Communist China, and some AL leaders seem suspicious of Chinese intentions. The US is apparently held in high esteem by several senior AL leaders. At the same time there have been frequent contacts between Soviet diplomats and AL leaders, and Soviet assistance after the cyclone of 1970 was substantial.

28. Militarily, East Pakistan would be weak. About ten percent of the current 350,000-man military establishment are East Pakistanis. The highest ranking East Pakistani is Lieutenant General Khawaja Wasiuddin, II Corps commander, one of the very few to reach general officer or flag rank. In the regular army, only the battalions of the East Bengal Regiment would presumably revert to Bangladesh as complete units.

29. Even ten percent may be an overestimate of the strength likely to accrue to East Pakistan. Only about five percent of the present army's officers are East Pakistanis. Moreover, many of them might well opt to stay with West Pakistan. General Wasiuddin, for example, is descended from

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Kashmiris. An estimated half of the East Pakistani officers and NCOs in the East Bengal Regiment are not actually Bengalis, but are immigrants or descendants of immigrants from other parts of the subcontinent. Moreover, ambitious officers might well feel that their careers would be better served by remaining in the large, well-equipped army that would accrue to West Pakistan.

30. Equipment would be another problem. East Pakistan might end up with no more heavy equipment than five PT-76 tanks, and even a distribution on current planned levels would give it at most two fighter squadrons, a few small patrol vessels, and a minimum of armor. Thus, East Pakistan would come into existence with an army of far less than 50,000 men, largely disorganized, badly equipped, and without the resources to improve soon.

31. In addition to regular armed forces, Bangla Desh would inherit a paramilitary force composed of the 10,000-man East Pakistan Rifles, which has internal security, antismuggling, and border patrol missions. There is also an estimated 800,000-man Ansars (helpers) force, a voluntary militia-type body that has helped the police when needed and has assisted in antismuggling operations. Only 100,000 of the Ansars have received any training at all, however, and possibly only 50,000 regularly participate in the activities of the force. Transportation available to the Ansars is minimal, and their arms consist of obsolete surplus army and police equipment held for them in the police stations. They would be of help, however, in supplementing the East Pakistan provincial police, an almost entirely Bengali force now numbering about 32,000.

Conclusion

32. Although an independent East Pakistan would begin with some assets, notably in the political realm but also including an ethnically homogeneous population, it would face economic problems

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of staggering proportions because of its dearth of natural resources, its burgeoning population, and its lack of capital, economic infrastructure, and entrepreneurial and technical skills. The dominant agricultural sector could make little headway unless flood waters were controlled, a process that would require considerable capital, most of which would have to come from foreign sources, and that would take many years to complete. In the meantime, if the volatile Bengalis became disenchanted with the rate of economic progress made under the AL, or if Mujib were suddenly removed from the political scene, they might turn to radical extremist groups. In that event, Communist China might find fertile ground for expanding its political influence in an area of considerable strategic significance. Finally, the economic and social problems are of such magnitude that Bangla Desh could disintegrate into continuing political chaos, the victim of the liabilities it inherited at its birth.

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